

INDIVIDUALS  
ENGAGING IN  
SOCIETY

*Citizenship Foundation*



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# political journalism competition organiser's guide

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**The Citizenship Foundation is an independent charity which aims to empower individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law, democracy and society.**

Founded in 1989, we focus particularly on developing young people's citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding. Our work includes:

- Citizenship resources for a wide audience from teachers to young offenders
- Nationwide and international training programmes
- National active learning projects for secondary schools and youth groups.
- Community projects to develop citizenship education as a collective responsibility
- Research to advance our understanding of best practice in citizenship education

Our national active learning projects are flagship examples of the value of learning through hands-on experience. In addition to the Political Journalism Competition outlined in this document, the Citizenship Foundation runs centrally the **National Youth Parliament Competition, Bar National Mock Trial Competition** and the **Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition**.

For more details on these projects please visit  
[www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/competitions](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/competitions)

## Introduction

Healthy democracies need well-informed citizens. The media is the source of almost everything we know about politics and is hugely influential in shaping our views. Yet we are often not aware of the processes involved in deciding which political issues are reported and how they are presented. Taking part in a Political Journalism Competition invites teams of young people, or individuals to take on the roles of media professionals researching and producing a news piece on a political issue of their choice. Depending on the resources available, they can choose to do this in either newspaper, radio or TV formats.

Between 2003 and 2007, The Citizenship Foundation ran a National Political Journalism Competition for 11-18 year olds across the UK. We are, unfortunately, unable to run the project as a national competition anymore, but had such positive feedback from the participants over the years that we decided to make the resources available to schools and youth groups, to enable them to run internal competitions themselves. The material in this guide describes how to run a political journalism competition in your school or youth group. It can be planned as part of normal class work or an extra curricular group activity.

The Political Journalism Competition supports the curriculum across a range of subjects, including Citizenship, English, Media Studies, Politics, Modern Studies, Humanities and the Social Sciences.

### **What the Citizenship Foundation will provide:**

- **An organiser's guide** (this document) outlining the process we recommend to make the competition as successful as possible.
- **A guide for participants** detailing how to put together an entry for participating young people
- **Entry forms** to accompany the entry when they hand it in for judging. These not only encourage reflection on the process the teams have gone through, but also give the judges an insight into the work that the teams put into their entry.
- **A judging guide**, including judging sheets, for those who will be choosing the winners. This could either be you, as organiser, external judges (journalists or MPs for example) or young people acting as peer assessors.
- **Certificates** for the organiser to download, print and sign for participants.
- **Evaluation forms** for the organiser and participants to return to the Citizenship Foundation. They will help us develop the resources we provide, and assist us with planning future projects.
- **Citizenship Foundation web resources.** The teacher's section of the website includes source materials on different topics such as foxhunting and lowering the voting age to 16. These can help signpost research. There is also guidance for teachers on how to approach controversial issues in the classroom

## Organising the competition

The following guidelines are based on the way the competition was set up to run nationally. You may need to adapt them in specific ways to suit your own situation. We hope these suggested guidelines are useful.

### **Cross-curricular working**

The broad nature of the political journalism competition means it is an ideal opportunity for cross-departmental working. Preparation for this competition can straddle a number of different relevant departments. Depending on which issues are chosen, it is possible to involve teachers from an even more diverse range of backgrounds, it is also a good way of sharing the workload between colleagues!

### **Technical understanding and resources**

A detailed technical understanding of how to layout newspaper pages, edit videos or produce radio interviews is not necessary to put together an entry, either on your part as an organiser, or for the young people involved. The judging guidelines look for creative entries that demonstrate a good understanding of the issue, not how well a video is edited or how professional a newspaper piece looks.

### **Teams and age limits**

We advise that young people either put together entries as individuals or in small teams of no more than 4 (so that there is enough work for everyone). The participant guide gives more details about how the work can be shared out.

You may want to link up with local schools, other youth groups, or open submissions to a range of classes or year groups. We didn't split the national competition into different age ranges, but instead asked the judges to "take the age of the entrants into account" when looking at their work. For this reason we opened it to 11 – 18 year olds. You may prefer to run different categories for different age ranges, or open it to younger or older participants.

## Suggested Timeline & Work Plan

### Deadlines for the entries

We gave teams a minimum of 2 months to work on their entry from the time they received their pack, to when the work was due in, you will adjust this according to your situation and your knowledge of the young people you are working with. A key time-factor to bear in mind is that in order to get quotes and information from primary sources (politicians, campaigners or those affected by the issue), this will often take much longer than expected. If you can, give them enough time to go through this process properly as it is this interaction with 'the real world' that gives this competition much of its benefit.

<b>Organiser*</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Hand out resources to participants</b> (Participant's guide, entry forms and judging sheets for reference)	Organise into teams.
Support teams with their preparations. You could do some introductory sessions on research and planning.	Decide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What story to work on</li> <li>• Which medium to use (TV, radio or newspaper)</li> <li>• The audience you are writing for and style of entry (tabloid/broadsheet etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Arrange judges</b> , either judge yourself, or arrange internal or external pairs or panels, (external judges may take longer to organise).	Complete initial research (ongoing task)
<b>Give judges judging guides.</b> You may want to run a quick practice judging session using some of the previous winners on the CF website	Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide who to approach.</li> <li>• Set up times and dates</li> <li>• Conduct and edit</li> </ul>
<b>Collect in entries and entry forms</b> , (copy them for judging if necessary) and hand out evaluation forms to young people.	Write/record main report or 'news' article (balanced facts)
<b>Allocate entries to judges</b> and give out for shortlisting.	Newspaper entrants write editorial (own opinions)
<b>Allocate shortlisted entries to second round/final panel</b> depending on the size of your competition	Final edits/layout of the piece, add pictures etc
Go through the judging sheets and collate special awards.	Do a final check of the entry, and complete entry forms.
<b>Announce winners</b> and collect in evaluation forms	Hand in entry and entry form.
<b>Print out certificates</b> , sign them (or get one of the judges, or headteacher to sign them) and add the participants' names.	Fill in evaluation forms, and return them to the competition organiser.
Organise an awards ceremony or assembly where certificates are presented and work is displayed.	Attend awards ceremony and receive certificate (if this takes place).
Return judging sheets and entries to teams.	

\* **Essential activities are in bold**, optional activities are in normal text.

## Format of Entries

Think carefully about the format that you request your entries in, it can have knock on effects on how easy it is to organise the judging. We suggest that:

**All Broadcast entries must include:**

- One or more interviews
- Analysis of the issue
- A Broadcast entry form

Your entry should be 4-5 minutes long

**Video format - TV**

You need to be very clear about the video formats that teams should submit their entries in. There is a vast range of software and hardware available to edit video. We have had real problems with entries that have been worked terribly hard on, not being able to be viewed by judges for technical reasons. For this reason we suggest that entries should be either submitted on standard VHS tape, or DVD (not minicam or digital tapes).

**Audio format - Radio**

For similar reasons we suggest that entries ought to be submitted on standard cassette tapes or audio CDs.

**All newspaper entries must include**

- A graphic and at least one headline
- A news report including quotes (750 words)
- An editorial on the same issue (2-300 words)
- A Newspaper entry form

One or two A4 pages, or one A3 page, laid out in a tabloid or broadsheet style. It can be in colour or black and white.

**Entries should be designed to fit as a PART of a larger programme, or newspaper – not the whole thing!**

## Organising judging

How you organise your judging will depend on how many teams are taking part in your competition, and how many judges you have at your disposal. These guidelines are based on the way that we set up the competition to run nationally (150+ entries) you will need to adapt them (skipping stages etc) to suit the amount of entries you have to judge

**Judging process** (skip stages as appropriate)

**Judging in pairs**  
(select 2/3 entries  
from set of 10)

**> moderate with another pair**  
(select best 2/3 from  
the possible 6)

**> Shortlisting panel**  
(select top 5 newspaper  
& top 5 broadcast)

**> final judging panel**  
(select separate winners in  
newspaper & broadcast)

We suggest that you judge Broadcast and Newspaper entries separately, (there are separate judging sheets provided) because although many of the skills of research and balance are the same for each type of entry, we would argue that it is very difficult to judge the two against each other. However, we thought the skills used in radio and TV journalism are similar enough to be judged against each other.

### **Who should act as judges?**

You could judge all the entries yourself but this may take you a while, and bringing others into the process can make the competition either more inclusive (by having young people act as judges), or give it more kudos (by bringing in real journalists from a local paper for example). You can always send entries to external judges if you cannot arrange for them to take part as a panel, although this is the ideal.

### **How long will it take?**

For newspaper entries, I would suggest that everyone is given time to read each of the articles, before any discussions are expected to take place, which is why it is useful to be able to have spares (or copies) so judges can take entries home. For TV and radio entries, allow at least as much time again to discuss the entry as it took to watch/listen to it, and bear in mind you may want to watch/listen to some of them again, after you have seen a few, to compare them.

We found it useful to organise judging in pairs (at least), so that the judges had another person to bounce ideas off, and discuss the merits and problems with different entries. It was interesting to hear the differences of opinion that arose, and to hear the discussions that were generated, really looking closely at whether teams fulfilled particular criteria or not. This process can be extremely useful as a learning experience in itself when students themselves are acting as judges.

You may want to ask for multiple copies of entries (or make extra copies yourself) so that judges can take them home with them, without the risk of losing originals. Remember also to copy the entry forms, as these should always be judged *as part* of the entries themselves.

### **Allocating entries to judges**

Try to do this as randomly as possible, so there can be no accusations of bias. Bear in mind this might mean that some judges may coincidentally get either a very good or a very bad heat, meaning that good entries get knocked out early, or entries that aren't so good get through to the final on an easy 'draw'. That is the nature of random judging. If you want, you could implement a 'fastest loser' system to counter this, where, as

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organiser, you reserve the right to 'save' an entry that is 'voted out' and keep them through to the next round.

### **Blind judging**

You can decide whether you want to give entries numbers rather than having them labeled with names (especially if students are judging each others work) however with filmed entries, there isn't really much point in this, and we would argue that impartiality is an important skill to master, along with judging to particular criteria.

### **Special Awards**

We would suggest that alongside the winners and runners up in the Broadcast and Newspaper categories, entries can be given Special Awards by the judges. These are for entries that have not won, but are felt to deserve recognition. This can be written on their certificate, or something similar.

For example, special awards could be used to reward a team with younger entrants or students with special needs, who clearly put in a lot of work, but failed to fulfil key criteria. They could also be given to a video that was technically excellent, but not successful otherwise, or a team that did fantastic research but misunderstood the guidelines and wrote a whole newspaper! (it has happened more often than you would think...)

At shortlisting level we suggest that the special awards are *nominated* by judges, but *awarded* by the competition organiser, to ensure fairness across different groups and to limit numbers.

There is a space on the judging form where the judges can specify what it was about the entry that they thought deserved special commendation.

### **Returning Judging sheets to participants**

It is up to you whether you want to show the judging sheets to the participants, or return them with the entries at the end of the process. This may depend on the temperaments of the young people involved and whether the advice given by judges is constructive and helpful or overly critical. When we ran it as a national competition we only fed back the two brief comments at the bottom "something to improve, something done well", but that involves a certain amount of organisation on your part. Whichever you choose to do, make sure you inform the judges, as it may well affect what they write on their sheets.

### **Technical Quality**

Please stress to everyone involved that entries WILL NOT be judged on technical quality, but they must be understandable. For example, if pictures are in black and white, rather than colour, or if the cuts between different sections in a radio entry are noisy, or the camera wobbles a bit in a video, it should not be marked down. If the judges cannot hear what you are saying, read what you have written, or see what you are shooting, they won't be able to give the marks that entry might deserve.

For broadcast entries we strongly suggest that every team plays it back (possibly with a new person who is watching or listening to it for the first time) to check that it plays and that the sound is okay before submitting it.



...And finally

### **Rewarding Young People's Work**

You may want to think about the best way to celebrate and reflect on the efforts of the young people who took part. For example...

- Organising an awards ceremony / assembly
- Giving certificates to all the participants
- Giving out prizes

### **Certificates**

On the Citizenship Foundation website there are blank certificates for you to print out and fill in for students, there are 'successfully participated' and blank versions (for winners and special awards). There are available in both colour and black and white. They can be printed or hand written on, there are templates for printing on them on our website.

### **Feedback & Evaluation**

At the back of this guide is an evaluation form, please fill it in and return it by fax or download the evaluation form online ([www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/npjc](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/npjc)) and return it to [npjc@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](mailto:npjc@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk).

We would be delighted if you could post or email us copies of a selection of the best entries you receive in your competition. We are hoping to build up a bank of good examples of political journalism to put on our website and to help us develop future media literacy projects. They won't be judged, or returned, so please keep your originals, and make sure they are clearly attributed to the young people who made it so we know who to credit if we should use it, and that we (The Citizenship Foundation) have their permission to use it online, in resources or broadcast.



Please fax this back to **020 7566 4131** or complete online and email to [npjc@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](mailto:npjc@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)

Organiser Name:	
Job Title:	
Organisation/School:	
Address:	
Tel:	Fax:
Email:	

Would you like to **register your interest** in participating in future political/media literacy projects run by the Citizenship Foundation? We will keep your details on file, and contact you as and when they become available.  Yes  No

1. Why did you decide to run the political journalism competition?

2. Did the young people involved enjoy taking part in the competition?  
 Yes  No  Not sure

3. Would you run it again?  Yes  No  Not sure

If yes, how could we improve the competition? **OR** If not, why not?

4. When you ran your political journalism competition, how many young people took part?

5. How many staff were involved and from which departments?

6. How long (approx.) did it take teams to complete their entries?

7. How long (approx.) did it take you to organise the competition in total?

8. Was the organiser's competition guide useful?  Yes  No  Not sure

9. Was the participant's competition guide useful?  Yes  No  Not sure

10. Was the judging guide useful?  Yes  No  Not sure

If no to any of the above, what else would have been useful to include?

11. What format would you have preferred the guides in?  
 Printed  PDF  Word  CD-Rom  Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

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12. Would any of the following have helped you with your competition? (please tick as many as apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> A short teaching DVD	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 day CPD training course
<input type="checkbox"/> Further interactive resources on the website	<input type="checkbox"/> Contact details of MP/media organisations
<input type="checkbox"/> A visit from a journalist	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical training workshops in video/audio
<input type="checkbox"/> A small bursary to spend on equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)
<input type="checkbox"/> A visit from the Citizenship Foundation	

13. If there had been a national competition running this year, with your teams or individuals competing against those from other schools or youth groups, would you have entered it?  Yes  No  Not sure

If yes, why? OR If no, why not?

14. If there had been a £50 deposit to enter the national competition (which was returned when the entry was received) would you still have taken part?

Yes  No  Not sure

15. Can you think of any suitable prizes for future winners of a national competition?

16. What do you think the young people involved learnt from the competition?

17. What do you think you learnt from the competition?

18. What would you say was the most difficult thing about the competition?

19. What advice would you give another team entering for the first time?

20. Any other comments?

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire.**

## Useful Quotes

"Citizenship helps young people understand what it means to belong to communities, to understand their rights and responsibilities towards others. It fosters respect for democracy, law and justice and for different opinions, values and cultures"

**Citizenship Foundation**

"Political journalists find out how decisions made by a handful of powerful men and women affect people's daily lives. If you're someone who uses the word "why" a lot, and you like communicating ideas and opinions, then you'll find this competition is an ideal outlet."

**Martha Kearney - Political Editor,  
BBC Newsnight**

"In a time where it's become cool to say politics is boring, the political journalist has to grab people by the scruff of the neck and say *'this is important. It's about how you live, and what's being done in your name. If you switch off now, don't come complaining when it all goes horribly wrong'*. Journalism can, sometimes, change things."

**Krishnan Guru-Murthy – Presenter,  
Channel 4 News**

"Politics is about real life and real people. It's serious - and it's exciting. Get involved. It's the way to change things. And you'll enjoy it."

**John Humphrys – Presenter,  
Today Programme, Radio 4**

"As a political journalist, you can ask the questions that voters want answered. It's democracy in action."

**Mary Ann Sieghart - Assistant Editor,  
The Times**

"Political journalism is about finding out who is responsible for something, asking them to explain themselves and telling everyone else about it. If you're not happy about what they're doing, it might not stop you from being angry - but at least you won't feel so powerless."

**Polly Billington – BBC Political reporter**